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Birkholz fighting spread of invasive species in Michigan

LANSING – Fighting the spread and destruction of invasive species in Michigan has received a major boost as the Senate voted to make protecting Michigan’s ecosystem a top priority, announced Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township.

The Senate passed a package of bills today (Senate Bills 211-217, 507) that is designed to protect Michigan’s environment from invasive plants and insects like the Eurasian milfoil, hydrilla and Emerald Ash Borer that destroy natural Michigan species.

“Michigan’s natural ecosystem is threatened and harmed by foreign plants and insects that crowd out and kill native vegetation,” Birkholz said. “We are working diligently to stop the spread of species already in Michigan and prevent any more from being introduced. This legislation will ensure future generations will still have clean and healthy resources to enjoy.”

One of the bills in the package would help educate the public on how to identify and control the nonnative species. It would create the Invasive Species Fund and require the Department of Natural Resources to post the list of prohibited and restricted species on their website and provide photos or sketches of each one. The fund would be supported from fines, penalties and permit fees collected under the new act.

Other bills in the package would:

- Identify prohibited insects and aquatic plant species;
- Prohibit the release and introduction of certain insects and aquatic plant species;
- Amend the Natural Resources and Protection Act to recognize the existence of and prohibit genetically engineered or non-native aquatic plants;
- Establish fines and penalties for violating the new regulations;
- Require the DNR to post requirements and penalties on their website; and
- Establish a Non-native Species Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council would establish criteria for identifying infested waterways and make recommendations regarding the state’s efforts to eradicate invasive species. The council also would report annually to the Legislature with recommendations for additions to the lists of invasive species and infested waterways.

This legislation is similar to prohibitions put in place last year to protect Michigan’s waterways from invasion by non-native fish species.